

Is This Really A Cheaper Way to Go To Mars?

By Gary Martin, NASA Space Architect, writing in response to the *Los Angeles Times*

President Bush has proposed a compelling vision for extending humankind's reach into the cosmos. To say these long-term goals can be accomplished with a 20-billion dollar door prize is not realistic. This notion has been proposed by Robert Zubrin and advocated in this newspaper by Max Boot ("A Cheaper Way To Go To Mars," *LA Times*, January 22nd)

The long-term exploration of space will bring about important technological and scientific benefits for all of humanity, well justifying the costs. But one must also be realistic. The costs of extending human civilization well beyond Earth will be require meaningful governmental support. While commercial and private sector participation will certainly help fuel this endeavor, it is not realistic to believe that commercial enterprise is capable of mounting the long-term, complex and technologically daunting endeavor the initial exploration missions to the Moon and beyond will require. Of course, the quicker commercial interests can find ways to make a profit in space the easier it will be for the nation to sustain exploration. However, the dream of private enterprise taking the lead in the human exploration of the solar system is not feasible today.

The men and women of NASA continue to develop the leading-edge technology required to turn the President's vision into reality. The Nation, through NASA, will lead the way for humanity to realize the promise of extensive human space exploration in the 21st century. In the long run, the investments from the pioneering efforts of NASA will be the foundation for the blossoming of sustainable commercial enterprise in space in the decades ahead.